

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 9897

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, TH
SUBJ: RTG REFUGEE POLICY

REF: BANGKOK 8817

1. LESLIE A. GOODYEAR, UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR WESTERN SOUTH ASIA, INFORMED US APRIL 4 THAT THE RTG MAY SKETCHILY BE CONSIDERING SOME POSSIBILITIES OF LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND. THE INTIMATION CAME FROM A BRITISH EMPLOYEE OF A PRIVATE COMPANY THAT WORKS FOR THE THAI MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. THE EMPLOYEE HAD MENTIONED TO A BRITISH EMBASSY OFFICER THAT INTERIOR HAD ASKED THE COMPANY TO INVESTIGATE THE FEASIBILITY OF SETTLEMENT OF A COMBINED GROUP OF SOME 70,000 REFUGEES AND THAI CITIZENS. THE SITE WAS A DESOLATE AREA IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE KHORAT PLATEAU IN NORTHEAST THAILAND. GOODYEAR, WHO WAS RELUCTANT TO SAY MUCH ABOUT THE SCHEME, EMPHASIZED THAT THIS PROPOSAL WAS NOT WELL THOUGHT OUT AND MAY GET NOWHERE, BUT IT NEVERTHELESS INDICATED THAT INTERIOR MIGHT BE LESS INFLEXIBLE ON LOCAL SETTLEMENT THAN IT HAD BEEN DURING THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

2. GOODYEAR ALSO SAID THAT HIS OFFICE WAS TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS NOTE VERBALE SUMMARIZING A
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CONVERSATION WITH A VISITING UNHCR GENEVA OFFICIAL IN FEBRUARY. HIS OFFICE JUST RECEIVED THE NOTE, WHICH MFA DESCRIBED AS ROUTINE, BUT HE IS TRYING TO SEIZE ON ONE ASPECT OF IT TO INDICATE UNHCR SUPPORT FOR ANY POSSIBLE SETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES, ALONG WITH THAI, IN THE IMMEDIATE AREAS OF UNHCR-SUPPORTED CAMPS. GOODYEAR SAYS HE IS TRYING TO ENCOURAGE THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, WHICH IS GENERALLY MORE FORTHCOMING ON REFUGEE POLICY THAN INTERIOR.

3. ON ANOTHER TOPIC, GOODYEAR HOPES TO SPEND ALL OF THE TWO MILLION DOLLARS HE HAS BUDGETED THIS YEAR FOR SELF RELIANCE PROJECTS IN UNHCR-SUPPORTED CAMPS IN THAILAND. HE SAID SUCH PROJECTS ARE NO LONGER "JUST CHICKENS AND EMBROIDERY", BUT HAVE GRANDER DESIGNS. HE SPOKE ENTHUSIASTICALLY OF A U.S. COMPANY THAT WOULD BE SENDING TWO EXPERTS - ONE ON SKILLS AND THE OTHER ON MARKETING - TO HANDLE THE KEY PROBLEM OF DISTRIBUTION FOR REFUGEE HANDICRAFTS. THE COMPANY FELT THAT IT COULD ESTABLISH AN OUTLET BASED ON THE PRODUCTS FURNISHED BY 20,000 REFUGEES. THE UNHCR WAS PREPARED TO ALLOCATE A \$50,000 BURN OVER FUND FOR PURCHASE OF MATERIALS FOR THIS PROJECT.

4. COMMENT: PARA 6 OF REFTTEL STATED THAT GOODYEAR HAD SAID THAT THE RTG HAD APPROACHED THE BRITISH ON POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO LOCAL SETTLEMENT. A SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION REVEALED THAT GOODYEAR WAS REFERRING TO THE SCHEME DESCRIBED IN PARA 1 OF THIS TELEGRAM. GIVEN THE MOI RECORD ON THE CONCEPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS POST-NOVEMBER 15 EXCLUSIONARY POLICY, THE UNHCR DOES NOT INVEST HIGH HOPES ON THE INTERIOR FEELER TO THE BRITISH COMPANY. WE ARE NEVERTHELESS ALERT TO ENCOURAGING THAI INTEREST IN LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES AND HOPE NEW LONGER TERM USG PROGRAMS WILL BE SPUR TO THE RTG IN FACING UP TO THIS QUESTION.
WHITEHOUSE

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